

Thought for the Day 1st August 2020 from Tony Whatmough

Luke 23:1-12 Jesus before Pilate



“Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, ‘We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.’ Then Pilate asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ He answered, ‘You say so.’ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, ‘I find no basis for an accusation against this man.’ But they were insistent and said, ‘He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.’

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had wanted to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.”

How do you solve a difficult problem? By passing the buck! This seems to be what Pilate and Herod were doing. Jesus had been brought before Pilate, but Pilate can find no fault in him, so passes him over to Herod.

Herod had always been interested in Jesus. He had heard a lot about him, but had never been able to meet him in person. There is something fascinating about supreme goodness even if you don’t believe in it. The German philosopher, Rudolf Otto in his book, *The Idea of the Holy* summed it up as *tremendum et fascinans*, terrifying and fascinating all at the same time.

This was clearly the effect on Herod and Pilate. Both were ruthless men in their own spheres, yet they found the goodness of Jesus attractive, so much so that they couldn’t bring themselves to condemn him, but passed him back and forth, always hoping that the other would make the

decision, which probably in their heart of hearts, they knew to be wrong. In that sense, they illustrate what David Jenkins called, our 'sense of solidarity in sin.'

But there is that intriguing verse at the end of our reading: 'That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other.' If the death of Jesus brings about reconciliation between God and us, it can also bring about reconciliation between us as well, as it so dramatically illustrated in this verse.

Herod of course, came to a bad end and although some sources suggest that Pilate become a Christian and died as a martyr, history doesn't tell us much about this. Both of them come across to Christians as being weak-willed and evil, allowing Jesus to be crucified.

But for our Thought for the Day, that last verse is something to reflect upon: That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other.

Can we also be agents of reconciliation in our own day?